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THE RAILWAY MAIL SERVICE

By CLARK E. CARR

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HON. GEORGE B. ARMSTRONG
FOUNDER OF THE POSTAL RAILWAY

THE RAILWAY MAIL SERVICE

ITS ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

BY

CLARK E. CARR

AUTHOR OF "THE ILLINI," "MY FATHER AND GENERATION,"
AND "LINCOLN AT GETTYSBURG"



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1908 AND 1909

Published February 6, 1909

BY CLARK E. CARR
VOLUME 1

The Lakeside Press
R. R. DONNELLEY & SONS COMPANY
CHICAGO

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JUST A WORD

THE author of this little book entered the postal service of the United States in April, 1861, upon the accession of the Republican party, and remained in the service almost a quarter of a century. During that time the postal railway service was conceived and inaugurated and brought to a high state of efficiency.

My official duties brought me into intimate personal relations with Mr. George B. Armstrong, who founded the service, with Mr. George S. Bangs, who established and put into operation the fast mail, and Captain James E. White, who has brought the whole system into its present state of perfection.

The account presented in this book appeared substantially in the same form in my recent volume of recollections, "My Day and Generation." I have tried to make the article of interest to the general public, but I have also had especially in mind its appeal to the great army of faithful and efficient postal railway clerks, who, night and day, in darkness and sunshine, through storm and flood, are traversing this vast continent, so distributing our mail that it may reach its destination in the shortest time possible.

That I did not underestimate this appeal has been shown by the wide number of inquiries made

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Just a Word

of my publishers for copies of the article in booklet form, and it is in answer to these inquiries that the material is now republished in a form that should place it within the reach of every postal clerk in the United States.

CLARK E. CARR.

GALESBURG, ILLINOIS,
January 22, 1909.

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THE RAILWAY MAIL SERVICE

I KNOW no more striking way to illustrate the improvements in the railway mail service, than to give, first, an account of the appointment and service of "Hoss Eddy."

The Hon. W. H. Eddy, whom I knew well, was long one of the best informed men in Chicago. Of much more than ordinary ability, he was, when I knew him, a powerful man politically. A Republican, really an abolitionist, if any one wished to carry the city either in a party caucus or in an election, it was important to have his support. His business for many years was connected with horses, sale stables, livery stables, and the like, and hence notwithstanding his ability and political prominence, he acquired the sobriquet of "Hoss Eddy," which he was never able to shake off. Like many another Chicago politician of that day, he was a speculator, sometimes on the high road to pros-

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perity, sometimes poor; but always full of humor, brilliant, and companionable. At different times he owned for his stables some of what is now the most valuable property in the city. He lived to see property he had bought for a few hundred dollars worth millions.

At a time when fortune was frowning upon Mr. Eddy, when, as he said, he was "in Valley Forge," the Hon. I. N. Arnold, then a member of Congress from Chicago, had him appointed mail agent between Chicago and Burlington, a position which was duly accepted.

Already past middle life, it was beyond possibility for Eddy to master the details of the service. He was conscientious and worked hard, but he could not get his mail separated and ready to put off at the proper stations. In his haste, he made so many mistakes that the mails were out of joint all along the line. His struggles to succeed became pitiful. Never was there such demoralization of the mails; and never were there so many complaints. The profanity of the traditional army in Flanders was nothing compared with that along the line of the Burlington Railway.

Finally, one day, just as the train stopped at Altona, a farmer with a superb span of horses drove up beside the mail car and stopped to ask a question.

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Eddy, coatless and hatless, with his mail key dangling at his side, jumped out of his car and began a searching examination of the team. While engaged in this, the train started. Away it went, unobserved by him, until too late to catch on. Realizing that this was the last straw, he telegraphed his resignation, bought the team of horses, and that night was on his way to Chicago with them. After driving them long enough to accustom them to the city, he sold them to Mr. Potter Palmer, realizing, in clear profit, more than a mail agent's salary for a year.

Long after, when fortune had smiled upon him again, it was amusing to hear Mr. Eddy tell of his career as a mail agent. "Mine was the fairest distribution of mail ever made," I heard him declare in presence of George S. Bangs, who enjoyed the joke beyond measure: "Bangs was post-master at Aurora and I was working under his direction, so I did just as he told me to do. As the mail came into the car I piled it all upon the big table, and when the locomotive whistled for a station I looked out of the window to see how big a town we were going into and then poked into a mail bag what I thought was that town's share and put it off. For instance, Riverside is small, and I gave them about half a peck; Downer's Grove larger, and I gave them a peck; Hinsdale about the same; and when I looked out and

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saw Aurora, big as it is, I gave them a full bushel. It's the fairest way ever devised, for each town got her share. Still they grumbled and began putting the mail back onto me. Finally, when they found that I knew my rights and had political backing, they went and gave their mail to the agent who ran on the train opposite to me, and I got rid of it. It's so hard to make people appreciate their blessings. They're grumbling yet."

Eddy told his story with a straight face, and there was enough truth in it to make him remembered by every old postal official on the Burlington system. Even now a complaint of miscarriage of letters at a post-office window is often answered by the declaration that "'Hoss Eddy' must be running again."

At that time there was only a single mail agent in charge of the mail upon a train. He seldom had a car by himself, but only a compartment in a car. Cars in those days were divided into two, or sometimes three, compartments — one for mail, another for baggage, and a third for express business. Usually the only mails he distributed were those for the towns on his line. There was no night service. On the great Western lines, as from Chicago to Omaha, a mail agent ran each way during the day, giving service along the line daily from each direction. The towns along a line neither received



HON. W. H. EDDY

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direction and advice of a practical post-office man of whom we shall speak, this system of billing and wrapping was abandoned, and all the letters destined to a particular office were simply tied together in a bunch with a plainly directed letter on the outside, and this, with a single handling, went to its destination.

When Mr. Lincoln came into office the Democratic officials, holding practically all the positions, were removed, and Republicans appointed to their places. Experience and aptitude were not essential to an appointment, it being required only that a candidate was ordinarily intelligent, and a Republican. These appointments were left to the Senators and members of Congress, and their recommendation was sufficient to insure the appointment. It was under this system that "Hoss Eddy" was given his place.

I was appointed post-master at Galesburg in April, 1861. I knew nothing of the postal service. It had been the same with all my predecessors. As was the case with every appointment made in those days, the appointee was expected to learn the duties of the position after entering upon it. I was fortunate in finding in the office a clerk expert in his duties, and I retained him.

John L. Scripps, then one of the proprietors of

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the Chicago *Tribune*, an able and worthy man, was appointed post-master at Chicago about the same time. I frequently visited the Chicago office for the purpose of informing myself in my duties, and found that, able as he was, Mr. Scripps knew no more of the duties of a post-master than I.

GEORGE B. ARMSTRONG

I found, however, that Mr. Scripps had an assistant post-master, George B. Armstrong, who had been in that position in that office for several years and who really understood the business of the office. He proved to be the most efficient, practical, and intelligent post-office official I had ever seen. He was polite and kind to me, and assisted me greatly by his instructions.

Mr. Armstrong was then in his prime, just entering upon his fortieth year. He was of medium height, good figure, elastic in his movements, had auburn hair and a fair complexion, and was the picture of health. He was frank, open, and earnest in expression, and enthusiastic in everything he undertook, especially in matters pertaining to postal affairs. He had a lisp pronounced enough to characterize his speech, without at all interfering with his pronunciation or being in the least disagreeable. He was familiar with every detail of the workings of

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the Chicago post-office, and knew everything in every department, from the sorting and distribution of mail to a complete mastery of all the accounts. He understood every postal route out of Chicago, and knew just where to throw every letter to insure its reaching its destination in the shortest time. Withal he delighted in instructing and assisting every postal official to such familiarity with his duties as would bring the best results for the service. He brought the Chicago office up to the highest standard; not only that, but he greatly contributed toward bringing other post-offices up to his own high standard.

My first interview with Armstrong taught me the advantage of his suggestions and advice, and I availed myself of them whenever I had the opportunity.

The Chicago post-office under his management — he had then served as assistant post-master under different administrations for several years — seemed as nearly perfect as possible. Upon so declaring to Mr. Armstrong, I found that he regarded it as far from perfect — that he could see many ways in which the system in vogue could be improved. Like all progressive men who achieve results, one point of attainment served to place him in a position where he could see still higher

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and more worthy objects of achievement beyond; so he was constantly planning and working to cure the defects in the postal service and, by adopting new methods, to add to its efficiency. No one, not then connected with the service, can realize what a saving it has been in time and labor to dispense with the unnecessary system of billing and wrapping letters. One of the first reforms Mr. Armstrong suggested in his talks with me was that this be abandoned. He worked at this until it was accomplished.

I found that I was not the only new postal official who had the advantage of Mr. Armstrong's experience and guidance. In the general sweep of putting out Democrats and putting in Republicans, the other new post-office officials were no better informed of the duties of their positions than I. This was true not only of post-masters and their deputies, but also of special agents of the department, and the mail agents on the railways.

When thus sitting at Mr. Armstrong's feet, I was brought into contact with other new appointees in the postal service. Among these were the Hon. E. W. Keyes, post-master at Madison, Wisconsin, and the Hon. George S. Bangs, post-master at Aurora, Illinois. We became imbued with Mr. Arm-

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strong's enthusiasm, took great interest in his plans for improving the service, and assisted him so far as we could in influencing Mr. Lincoln's administration, especially the post-office department, to adopt his recommendations. Mr. Keyes was potential in Wisconsin politics and was able to give Mr. Armstrong an endorsement by a resolution of the legislature of that State. Mr. Bangs finally became one of the ablest officials of the postal railway service.

The new officials of the post-office department had hardly become settled in their positions when the Civil War came. In the glamour of raising and equipping armies and sending them to the field many achievements as necessary and essential as arms and ammunition and drill do not appear. Without food, shelter, clothing, and transportation, an army, like an individual, must succumb. But one of the most important elements in keeping up the *morale* of an army made up of Americans lies in the mails. Letters from home, from parents, from brothers and sisters, wives and sweethearts, are a constant means of encouragement to the American soldier, and nerve him to heroic deeds; while writing letters home is the greatest of consolations to him. They maintain in his heart the throb of patriotism which animates the whole nation.

In 1860 the Hon. David T. Linnegar, a Republi-

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can of southern Illinois, not then a resident of Cairo, consented to become the Republican candidate for Congress against John A. Logan, the Democratic candidate, in the district known as Lower Egypt, to give strength to the State and National ticket. Mr. Linnegar made a gallant fight with no possibility of election, Logan defeating him by a majority of about eighteen thousand. But he brought out the Republican vote which otherwise might have stayed at home, and this was also cast for the State and National Republican tickets, where it was needed.

As a recognition of his services in this regard President Lincoln made Mr. Linnegar post-master at Cairo. He knew no more of the duties of the office than we in northern Illinois, besides he had no Armstrong to teach him. The office was small and the business light,—as I remember he had three clerks. Suddenly, within forty-eight hours, the Cairo post-office, one of the smallest in the United States, became one of the greatest. Mail bags were thrown in by the hundred and by the thousand, filling up the rooms, projecting out of the windows, and piled up on the platforms. The western Union army had come to occupy Cairo and the region round about. I myself was there and saw the appalling congestion of mails. This was in the Spring of 1862.

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Poor Linnegar, entirely bewildered, could do nothing but telegraph the Postmaster-General at Washington for help. A few post-office clerks, detailed from the cities, were taken to Cairo, but they could do nothing without an effective head. It was a matter of surprise and gratification when George B. Armstrong appeared. Never was such a man more needed, and never was a man better equipped for such an emergency.

The first thing to do was to provide room in which to work, and then to improvise sorting and distributing tables, racks, and cases, so that several men could work efficiently. This was done in an incredibly short time. The mail bags were opened, the mail carefully sorted, the bags refilled and tagged for the command, the divisions, the brigades, or regiments, or the post-office at home, where the mail placed in them belonged. These bags were sent out to the army and away upon the railways until the congestion was relieved. The great piles of mail bags grew less and less as if by magic, until they disappeared altogether, and the clerks had then only to take care of the mail as it came in upon the trains and from the army. Of course, the business of the office continued to be enormous, but soon, with the extra number of clerks allowed him, Postmaster Linnegar was able to conduct the business

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satisfactorily, and Mr. Armstrong returned to his duties in the Chicago post-office. So great was the appreciation of Mr. Armstrong's services by the clerks in the Cairo office that they presented him with a valuable watch, bearing upon the case the following inscription:

*Presented to
GEORGE B. ARMSTRONG
for his wife
By clerks of the Cairo Post Office
as a token of their
appreciation of his labors
in organizing that office
May 28th, 1862*

When Mr. Armstrong first unfolded to me his plans for establishing the postal railway service, or what he called "putting the post-offices on wheels," I do not remember. Colonel Francis A. Eastman, a neighbor and friend of Mr. Armstrong's and afterward post-master at Chicago, stated that Mr. Armstrong first unfolded his plans to him in 1861. I cannot say that he spoke to me upon the subject so early as that, but I remember distinctly that for a long time before he officially recommended the system to the department, his mind was engrossed with it. I think that he spoke to me concerning it at about the time he unfolded his plans to Mr. Keyes and Mr. Bangs. So interested was he in the matter that he

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could talk of little else. Like other pioneers in invention and discovery whose achievements have proved blessings to mankind, he was absorbed in his subject, and everything else was to him comparatively trivial.

He would no doubt have induced the department to make a test of his plans much earlier, but for the Civil War. He impatiently waited until the Summer of 1864, when he addressed three letters to the Third Assistant Postmaster-General, following closely upon each other, dated May 10, May 14, and June 10, respectively.

To illustrate the character of these letters it is only necessary to quote from one, as follows:

Letters deposited in a post-office at the latest moment of the departure of the mail from the office for near or distant places should travel with the same uninterrupted speed and certainty as passengers to their places of destination. . . . Passengers travelling over railroad routes generally reach a given point in advance of letters, when to that given point letters must pass, under the present system, through a distributing office, and when letters are subject to a distributing process in more than one distributing office as is largely the case now, the tardiness of a letter's progress toward its place of destination is proportionately increased. But a general system of railway distribution obviates this difficulty. The work being done while the cars are in motion and transfers of mails from route to

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route and for local delivery on the way, as they are reached, letters attain the same celerity in transit as persons making direct connections.

The Hon. A. N. Zevely, the Third Assistant Postmaster-General, to whom these letters were sent, was an enterprising official and thought Mr. Armstrong's plans should be given a fair trial. The Hon. Montgomery Blair was then Postmaster-General in Mr. Lincoln's cabinet, and Mr. Zevely laid Mr. Armstrong's recommendations before him. Others to whom Mr. Armstrong had outlined his plans orally and in writing recommended the trial. Among these were Mr. Keyes and Mr. Bangs, already mentioned, and the writer. One of those who took up the matter with enthusiasm was the Hon. Schuyler Colfax, then Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Postmaster-General Blair was induced to give the plan a trial and authorized it be done. The following is a copy of his letter of instruction to Mr. Armstrong:

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT,

July 1st, 1864.

SIR:— You are authorized to test by actual experiment, upon such railroad route, or routes, as you may select at Chicago, the plans proposed by you for simplifying the mail service. You will arrange with railroad companies to furnish suitable cars for travelling post-offices; designate head offices with their dependent offices; prepare forms

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of blanks and instructions for all such offices, and those on the railroad not head offices, also for clerks of travelling post-offices.

To aid you in this work, you may select some suitable route agent whose place can be supplied with a substitute, at the expense of the department.

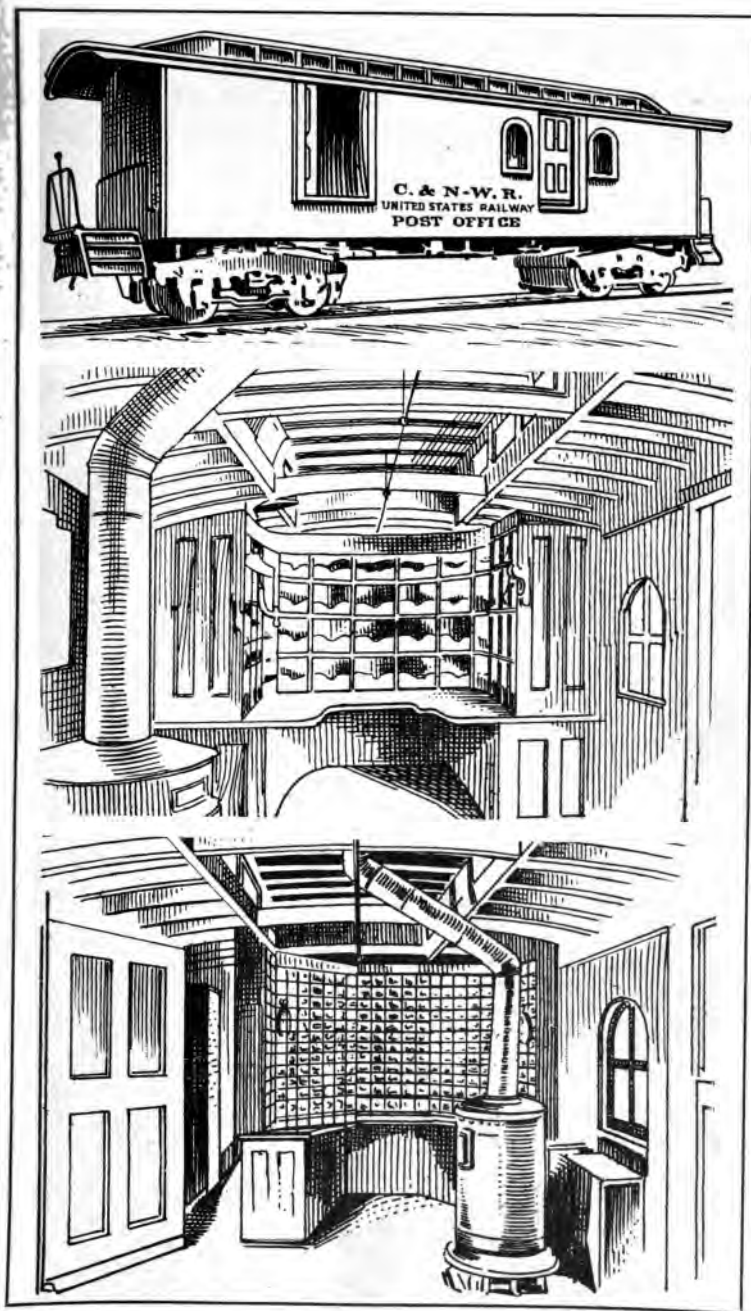
When your arrangements are complete, you will report them in full.

M. BLAIR,
Postmaster-General.

The first railway post-office in the United States was established by Mr. Armstrong under the above instructions on August 28, 1864, on the Chicago & North-Western Railway. It ran between Chicago, Illinois, and Clinton, Iowa, in a compartment car. The first complete railway post-office cars were built by the same railway from plans furnished by Mr. Armstrong in 1867, and placed in service between Boone and Council Bluffs, Iowa. The overland mail to the Pacific coast then went by the Chicago & North-Western Railway, upon which those towns were situated, and these cars were run to provide for the immediate despatch westward, of that great mail upon its arrival at the Missouri River, instead of lying over at a distributing post-office as had been necessary up to that time. By this arrangement mails were ascending the Rocky Mountains, five hundred miles west, at a time when they otherwise would have been leaving Omaha.



BRONZE TABLET ON SHAFT OVER THE GRAVE OF
GEORGE B. ARMSTRONG



THE FIRST RAILWAY POST-OFFICE CAR
SHOWING PAPER AND LETTER CASES

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manner of distributing and forwarding mail, made mail cars post-offices on wheels, and transferred mail from an incoming to an outgoing train to continue on toward its destination without a moment's delay.

Had the system been inaugurated in 1862, as has been asserted, Postmaster-General Blair, in the official order directing him to proceed with his plans, would scarcely have said to Mr. Armstrong in 1864, "You are authorized to test upon such railroad route or routes as you may select at Chicago *the plans proposed by you* for simplifying the mail service." *

Curiously, at the very time when Mr. Armstrong was beginning to test by actual experiment his plans for "putting post-offices on wheels," a railway car was invented and began to be introduced, which has contributed perhaps more than anything else to the comfort and convenience of railway travel.

It was in the same year, 1864, that George M. Pullman in and about Chicago began to build and put into operation his sleeping cars. It is hardly possible to overestimate the advantages of Mr. Pullman's invention. In one of them the traveller can continue his journey indefinitely without fatigue. He can devote himself assiduously to business all day,

* The Italics are mine.

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when weary and worn lie down in a comfortable bed at night, to wake up refreshed in another city hundreds of miles away in the morning, and ready for work there. He can traverse the entire continent without losing an hour of his usual sleep. If one could estimate the time saved for work and business by these sleeping cars he would find that they have added enormously to the wealth of the country and of the world. Surely George M. Pullman was one of the world's benefactors.

For his invention, as has been the case with many others, Mr. Pullman was rewarded. He amassed a great fortune. It is entirely proper and just that, through patents, those who have added to the wealth of the country and to the comforts of life should be able to reap substantial reward.

Mr. Armstrong no doubt devoted as much thought to the conception and inauguration of the postal railway system and to the building and equipment of the postal railway cars as did Mr. Pullman to the conception and inauguration and building of sleeping cars, but Mr. Armstrong was merely a government official and could receive no compensation or emoluments from the great system he inaugurated other than the salary he earned, which was expended in the support of himself and family.

On May 3, 1871, after serving for a little more

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than two years as general superintendent of the postal railway service, George B. Armstrong resigned because of failing health. He had been able, however, to complete the organization of the system, and lived to see it generally established throughout the country. He died in Chicago on May 5, 1871, only two days after his resignation.

GEORGE S. BANGS

George B. Armstrong founded and inaugurated the postal railway service, and George S. Bangs founded and inaugurated the Fast Mail. The Fast Mail was necessary to bring the postal railway service to its highest standard of efficiency. But for the postal railway service — facilities for separating and distributing mail on the cars while in motion — the Fast Mail would have been impossible.

George S. Bangs was among Mr. Lincoln's first appointees. He was first made post-master at Aurora. Of striking personality, he was one of the most forceful men it has ever been my good fortune to know. He was courageous, energetic, determined, and at the same time frank and openhearted. He had a commanding influence in politics, and was able to get what he wanted. Instead of Senators and members of Congress dominating him, they



George S. Bangs

WHO INAUGURATED THE FAST MAIL

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consin, and the upper peninsula of Michigan. He administered the service in his division with such consummate ability that, upon Mr. Armstrong's retirement, May 3, 1871, he was summoned to Washington to succeed him as general superintendent. Mr. Armstrong had created the vast system — had, so to speak, builded the mighty machine, and put it in working order. It remained for Mr. Bangs, his follower and pupil, to bring it to the highest efficiency.

Mr. Bangs held the superintendents of the different divisions to strict accountability for the efficiency of the railway service under their jurisdiction. He established a system of checks upon postal railway mail clerks through which delays of mail could be traced directly to the person responsible, who was immediately called to an account and reprimanded, suspended, or removed from office, or exonerated, if unjustly accused. The service was divided into grades with differences in pay, clerks being promoted as they became more proficient in their work. All appointments were made to the lowest grade, from which men were promoted or dropped out.

This was before the days of what is now known as civil service reform. Appointments in the postal railway service were still made by the new adminis-

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tration upon the recommendation of Senators and members of Congress. Mr. Bangs was too discreet a man and too astute a politician to abolish or override this custom. He did a much wiser thing. As vacancies occurred, he advised the Postmaster-General to appoint postal clerks upon the recommendation of members of Congress as before. Had the merit system, as it is called, in making appointments been then adopted in the postal railway service, Congress would have turned against it and refused appropriations.

A policy was adopted, however, upon Mr. Bangs's recommendation, which gave efficiency to the service and at the same time was entirely satisfactory to the Senators and members of Congress. It was to appoint such men as were recommended, upon probation, to give them a three months' trial, and if, at the end of that time, they proved to be competent and valuable, to keep them. Otherwise they were dropped, and others, recommended by the members of Congress, given a trial.

Among other reforms a system was instituted under which the accuracy and efficiency of a postal clerk could be tested so thoroughly that there could be no question about the character of the work he performed — a system still followed.

At the time of the first inception of civil service

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reform, George William Curtis, Joseph Medill, and Dorman B. Eaton, three of the most earnest advocates of the reform, were made the commissioners to put it in operation. They at once repaired to Washington and visited the different departments of the Government. At the post-office department, in their calls upon the heads of the different bureaus they finally found themselves in Mr. Bangs's office. After some preliminary conversation in which they briefly outlined the work upon which they had entered, Mr. Bangs drew from his drawer a letter and handed it to Mr. Curtis, who appeared to be the spokesman of the party, saying, "Gentlemen, here is a letter I have lately received from one of my postal clerks. Perhaps it will interest you." I afterwards saw the letter and found it to be the most wonderful specimen of orthography I had ever seen. There was scarcely a word spelled correctly. It was a marvel how any one could possibly, with premeditation, develop the ingenuity to spell English words in so remarkable a manner. The construction of the sentences was not so bad — the writer stated clearly what he wanted and why, but the spelling was ridiculous.

Mr. Curtis, after reading the letter, passed it to the other members of the commission. It was so extraordinary and so full of surprises that they could

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not suppress their merriment, and as attention was directed to especial words they broke out into hearty laughter.

Thereupon Mr. Curtis proceeded to point the moral which was uppermost in his mind. He said, "Now, Mr. Bangs, you see the importance of the work of this commission. A man who writes such a letter as that, an official letter, evidently the best he can write, occupies one of the most responsible positions in the service of the Government. He is entrusted with missives the most important,—letters upon the prompt delivery of which may depend great business enterprises, that affect the weal or woe perhaps of vast numbers of people,—messages of love and condolence, of sympathy and hope, of sorrow and despair. It is the object of this commission to correct such evils, and to drive from the public service all such men." The others took up the matter and expressed themselves in the same manner and even more earnestly.

Mr. Bangs waited patiently until they finished, and then quietly remarked, "The man who wrote that letter is the best postal railway clerk in the United States."

The three commissioners were dumfounded and could scarcely believe Mr. Bangs to be in earnest. When they found him to be so, they asked how he

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could have the temerity to make such a statement in regard to a man who writes such a letter.

"I say so," answered Mr. Bangs, "simply because it is true; and you gentlemen propose to drive such a man out of my service. You cannot do it while I am here. You may be able to drive me out; you can have my resignation at this moment if you want it, but while I am here you cannot drive the best man I have out of my service. The question for me to ask concerning my men is, not whether they can spell or parse or name and bound the countries or cities of the earth, but whether they can do satisfactorily the work that they are put to do."

"But how can you say, Mr. Bangs," asked Mr. Curtis, "that a man who spells like that is a good postal clerk? How can you possibly give any evidence of it?"

"Come with me," said Mr. Bangs, "and I will show you."

He led them into a room where two men were at work before cases set up on a table, each case divided into numerous pigeon-holes. Upon the table were a great number of cards, upon each of which was printed the name of a post-office.

"These men," Mr. Bangs explained, "are postal clerks. All the men in the service are required at stated intervals to appear at one of the larger post-



THE "SWEAT CASE"

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man who wrote the letter I showed you made fewer mistakes than any other man in the service. In fact, he scarcely made any mistakes at all, and besides, he proved to be more speedy in his work than any other, a test that we are also now making.

"The thing to find out in the public service, as I said before," continued Mr. Bangs, "is, who can best do the work he is put to do, and keep him and promote him, and to rid the service of those who prove themselves incapable. This I am trying to do."

It is enough to say of the commission that they became convinced that the postal railway service

The examiner begins the examination by taking the seat just vacated by the clerk, and placing at hand, for reference, a corrected scheme of the State and a schedule of railway connections, to which he refers when in doubt as to the correct casing of a card. Then he takes the packages from the case, one at a time, and examines the address on each card until all the cards in the case have passed under review. In doing this work the examiner relies on his memory mainly, as the clerk does, except he has, as before stated, the scheme and schedule to refer to in cases of doubt, and this in the interest of the clerks as well as a help to the examiner. In distributing the cards the clerk places those addressed to offices at junctions in a special box or in the box occupied by those for the route which can supply them the quickest.

If distributed in a special box they are allowed to remain therein until the other boxes have been examined; then the examiner takes this package from the case and passes it in review, card by card, naming each in succession, and the clerk must be prepared to give the designation of each railway post-office centring at that junction, the time each is due to leave and arrive, and by which he would despatch mail to insure its quickest delivery when it can be despatched via two or more routes.

If the junctions are distributed to the route supplying them the quickest, the examiner calls the clerk's attention to them as they are reached and he must treat them as mentioned above. As the examination progresses and errors in the distribution are discovered they are shown to the clerk, as a matter of information, and on completion of each examination the examiner gives the clerk a statement of the result, the name of the State upon which he will next be examined, and informs him what will be the nature of the examination.

A record of all examinations is kept in the office of the superintendent to whose division the clerks examined are assigned.

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was at that time the most practical and the best civil service in the United States, and they so declared.

George William Curtis was so pleased and delighted with the service that he, in "Harper's Magazine," of which he was editor, published articles giving full and exhaustive accounts of it, illustrated with pictures of postal cars, showing the men at work and everything relating to the service, among which here was nothing more conspicuous than the sweat case.

This "sweat case," let it be noted, was invented by Captain James E. White, afterwards general superintendent of the postal railway service,—the examination case, as it is officially called. He was then chief postal clerk at Omaha, having been assigned to that position while running as a postal railway clerk. He conceived the idea and had the case made for the purpose of testing the capabilities of the clerks in his jurisdiction. When he had designed this examination case, as he named it, he had the master car builder of the Union Pacific shops make it.

But George S. Bangs's greatest achievement lies in the establishment of the Fast Mail. He was accustomed to say that he expected to see the time come when the mails would be given the preference over any passenger, and mail trains the

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right of way over all passenger trains, and that he was working to that end. In those good old conservative days of slow and sure, I thought his views chimerical, but I saw him succeed in inaugurating his system,—not only this, I, by his invitation, accompanied him on the first fast mail train ever run.

THE FIRST FAST MAIL TRAIN

This epoch-marking train went from New York to Chicago over the New York Central & Hudson River and the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern railways. It left New York at four o'clock on the morning of September 16, 1875, and was scheduled to arrive in Chicago at six o'clock on the morning of the following day. Mr. Bangs himself was in charge of the train when I joined it at Cleveland. I shall never forget the look of triumph that illumined the face of the great postal official as he stood upon the platform, watch in hand, as the mighty train, all of postal cars, came thundering into the station at Cleveland, on time.

It was interesting to talk with Mr. Bangs, seated as we were together on mail pouches and watching the postal clerks at their work, while the train sped upon its way. He told of the incidents of the momentous journey and of his campaigns with railway officials, finally expressing his high appre-

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iation and regard for the officials of the New York Central and the Lake Shore railways, who, so soon as they understood the matter, entered into it with enthusiasm, and provided this splendid train, thoroughly equipped for the service. As for the matter of the importance of a fast mail service, he said, "After loading this train to its utmost capacity, we left a large amount of mail on the platform in New York which we could not take. The fast mail is now established for all time. The public will never permit it to be discontinued."

Upon arriving at Toledo,— I think it was Toledo, — we were about twenty minutes late. The division superintendent of the railway, with Bangs, walked forward on the platform to the engine, and I followed. The schedule time for the train was fast for those days, and it was important to the railway that it should arrive on time, as the whole nation was watching it through the public press. The engineer leaned out of his cab as the superintendent spoke to him a few hurried words, of which I only heard him say as we hastily withdrew to the car, "You must make it."

We drove into the Lake Shore station at Chicago and stopped, some said, a minute ahead of, certainly on, time,— and the fast mail service was inaugurated. From that day forward there has never

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been a cessation of the fast mail service. Its benefits were so immediately apparent and gratifying that every one appreciated them. The people would no more consent to return to the old system than they would to go back to the old stage-coach mail routes.

The public watched this fast mail experiment with profound interest. There were those who said that such an innovation would be too expensive and was unnecessary. I remember that the St. Louis papers grumbled because the experiment was not made in the direction of St. Louis instead of Chicago, and assailed Mr. Bangs for taking the Chicago route. Wagers were made that the train would not make schedule time. The daily papers published reports from the train, and bulletins were displayed giving the time it was making from hour to hour. It was important to the railway officials that a train, every movement of which was being watched by the people of the whole great nation, should be on time. No man felt this in a greater degree than the engineer who made the final run into Chicago. He was wrought up to such a degree as to be overcome, but he held on until the goal was reached. As we got out of the cars there were a number of persons gathered about the engine. Upon approaching it we found the engineer lying flat upon his back in

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the cab. He had held the lever and kept his train in hand until he reached his destination, but upon releasing his grasp, had fallen back apparently dead; the great strain had been too much for him. But the brave engineer was soon restored to consciousness.

All the leading railways of the United States, east and west and north and south, now have fast mail trains, the speed of which averages forty miles an hour. They cover thousands of miles in extent, and each is equipped with the finest mail cars and ample crews of the most competent and efficient postal railway clerks. Trips both ways are made over these roads by fast mail trains every day.

As men and women read their letters from home and friends and kindred thousands of miles away, almost before the ink with which they are written is dry; as business men receive cash remittances and households get returns from their mail orders with such promptness; as, hundreds of miles from the metropolis where they are printed, we read at breakfast in our morning papers the news from every part of the globe, it is eminently proper, fitting, and just that we pause to reflect upon how and when and by whom all this has been made possible. When we so pause and reflect, we must place high

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upon the scroll of fame the names of George B. Armstrong and George S. Bangs.

CAPTAIN JAMES E. WHITE

In 1870 at Chicago, George S. Bangs introduced me to Captain James E. White, then quite a young man.

Mr. Bangs spoke of the young gentleman in terms of high commendation, saying that he had served for several years as a postal clerk, was capable and efficient enough to attract the attention of both George B. Armstrong and himself, and that they were about to make him, or had made him, chief postal clerk at Omaha. Captain White held this position of chief head clerk until the reorganization of the service through the retirement of Mr. Armstrong and the appointment of Mr. Bangs to the position of general superintendent, when, after a brief interval, he was made superintendent of the sixth division.

Finally, after several years of honorable service, Captain White was made general superintendent of the railway mail service at Washington. In the interim between the retirement of Mr. Bangs and this last promotion of Captain White, six persons held the position of general superintendent of the railway mail service, performing its duties conscientiously and ably and with credit to themselves. It was



CAPTAIN JAMES E. WHITE
WHO BROUGHT THE POSTAL RAILWAY SERVICE TO ITS PRESENT PERFECTION

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Time and space do not permit going into a detailed account of the improvements of the railway mail service in the handling and despatch of registered letters and packages. Such a detailed account would prove the high character and strict integrity of the railway mail clerks as well as show that there has been as great improvement in this important branch of the service.

THE EXAMINATION CASE

Had Captain White done no more than invent and put into operation the examination case, he would have accomplished enough to place his name high up among those of the illustrious men whose achievements created and brought to the highest efficiency the railway mail service. That device is a perfect test of the ability, the aptitude, the efficiency of every individual railway mail clerk in the United States. It makes no mistakes. It deals honestly and justly with each man who comes before it. There is no favoritism. It accords to every man the full meed of credit he deserves, just that and no more, and it exposes inefficiency and weakness. While it recognizes capacity and encourages the deserving, it has no patience with the incompetent and unworthy, and they are glad to retire from its august presence to other vocations. It is not re-

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markable that the unworthy tremble when required to stand before and be judged by such an inexorable tribunal. It is not remarkable that it should have been given the title of the "sweat" case.*

Captain White was a patriotic Union soldier in the Civil War and was wounded in his country's service. In his career as a postal official, through the grades of the railway mail service, he has imbued and maintained among all those in his department an *esprit de corps* that has given life and ambition and character and devotion to those with whom he has come in contact. Sitting at the feet of George B. Armstrong and George S. Bangs, and learning of them, he drank from the copious fountains of their experience and wisdom, and his breast became animated with the emotions that moved them. Their influence upon his youthful sensibilities caused him to think as they thought and to do as they did, to such a degree that in his judgment the delay of a letter was a crime, and with him carelessness or neglect in handling of mail was inexcusable.

* Captain White also originated "The schedule of mail and express trains at junctions."

The initial schedule was for the State of Wisconsin and was printed in the March, 1872, number of the "Chicago Postal Record." It was immediately approved by General Superintendent Bangs, who predicted it would become of inestimable value, and directed its use throughout the service. This schedule was followed month by month by schedules of other States. The first schedules had footnotes explaining and illustrating how they were intended to be applied, and the clerks soon understood the method sufficiently to make the discontinuance of these notes feasible.

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There was in his estimation no higher attribute of government than that of facilitating intercommunication among the people, and with the least possible delay bringing information to them from all parts of the world through the newspapers and

The first schedules were in sheet form, the next in book form, containing the names of the junctions and the information under each, as for instance:

JUNCTIONS		MAIL	EXPRESS
PEORIA			
Bureau Junc. & Peoria, Agt.	{ Leave	8:45 A. M.	10:00 P. M.
	{ Arrive	5:00 P. M.	6:00 A. M.
Indianapolis & Peoria, Agt.	{ Leave	9:05 A. M.	7:25 P. M.
	{ Arrive	3:20 P. M.	7:40 A. M.
Logansport & Warsaw, Agt.	{ E.	9:05 A. M.	7:15 P. M.
	{ W.	2:55 P. M.	8:40 A. M.
Peoria & Decatur, Agt.	{ Leave	11:45 A. M.	4:45 P. M.
	{ Arrive	7:15 P. M.	10:30 A. M.
Peoria & Galesburg, Agt.	{ Leave	3:20 P. M.	8:15 A. M.
	{ Arrive	11:25 A. M.	7:20 P. M.
Peoria & Jacksonville, Agt.	{ Leave	9:00 A. M.	5:00 P. M.
	{ Arrive	10:20 P. M.	7:00 P. M.
Peoria & Terre Haute, Agt.	{ Leave	10:50 A. M.	
	{ Arrive	3:10 P. M.	
Rock Island & Peoria, Agt.	{ Leave	8:50 A. M.	
	{ Arrive	6:30 P. M.	
Chicago & Peoria, Agt.	{ Leave	7:40 A. M.	
	{ Arrive	8:00 P. M.	
MACKINAW			
Indianapolis & Peoria, Agt.	{ E.	10:05 A. M.	8:37 P. M.
	{ W.	2:36 P. M.	6:29 A. M.
Peoria & Terre Haute, Agt.	{ E.	11:24 A. M.	
	{ W.	2:22 P. M.	
PARIS			
Danville & Vincennes, Agt.	{ N.	7:30 A. M.	
	{ S.	5:40 P. M.	
Indianapolis, Pana & St. L. R. P. O.	{ E.	2:43 P. M.	12:51 A. M.
	{ W.	11:21 A. M.	2:04 A. M.
Peoria & Terre Haute, Agt.	{ E.	6:00 P. M.	11:40 A. M.
	{ W.	8:10 A. M.	6:25 P. M.

Next came the sheet form again, which was more artistic and embraced all the States in the division and more information. The above example was copied from a schedule issued August 5, 1878.

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public journals. He thought no effort should be spared and no outlay in appropriations by Congress withheld, that would tend to bring about these results.

Captain White also realized that in order to make effective the work of the government in providing fast mail trains, with their equipment and all other appliances, the men in the postal railway service should be thoroughly equipped and ready upon the instant, through study and training, to handle and distribute all mail, and that they be conscientious in the performance of duty. He brought those men up to his own ideals — the highest standard of excellence, and kept them there during all his career as superintendent.

Captain White has laid down his burdens and retired to private life to try to recuperate from the strain of his long and arduous labors in the service of his country, followed by the affection and devotion of every man who ever knew him, and especially of those who served with him and under him. It is hardly possible that any other man could have accomplished so much in extending the scope and enlarging the bounds and usefulness of the railway mail service. Certain it is that no other man could have built up a more intelligent and efficient corps of men than those in that service.



ALEXANDER GRANT
PRESENT GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT OF THE RAILWAY MAIL SERVICE

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is scarcely any other work so trying upon the nerves or so fatiguing.

They are, while the train is in motion, always exposed to danger. At all hours of the day or night, in pitch darkness, when storms are raging, streams are swollen, and bridges unsafe, when, soaked with water the roadbed is unsteady, if the train goes out, the postal clerk must be in his car. Through desert sands and miry, treacherous swamps, through deep gorges and tunnels, around precipitous rocks, along shelves chiselled into the mountain-side, the train must go. Shut in his car, though the train be flying at the utmost limit of speed, though perils threaten and dangers appal, he has no warning. He has no chance to save himself. At the last extremity the engineer and fireman may jump, the soldier may shelter himself behind the breastworks, but there is no place of refuge for the railway postal clerk. In nearly every casualty that has happened to a railway postal clerk it has been demonstrated that when the crash came he was before his table at work, his memory enshrouded and enshrined in the messages of love and devotion and sorrow and hope he was faithfully striving to forward to their destination. When one becomes a railway postal clerk he takes his life in his hands.

During the last fiscal year (1907), there were 328

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railroad accidents in which postal clerks were either killed or injured, and in which mail matter was lost or damaged. There were killed sixteen mail clerks and one weigher. Seventy-seven mail clerks were seriously injured, 414 slightly injured.

I believe that the corps of fourteen thousand railway mail clerks is the most efficient body in the public service of the United States. I believe that in intelligence and devotion to duty and in heroism they are not surpassed by any body of men, including those in the army and navy. I believe that every postal railway clerk who faithfully serves through the strength and vigor of his mature life ought to be pensioned by the Government when he retires from the service.

